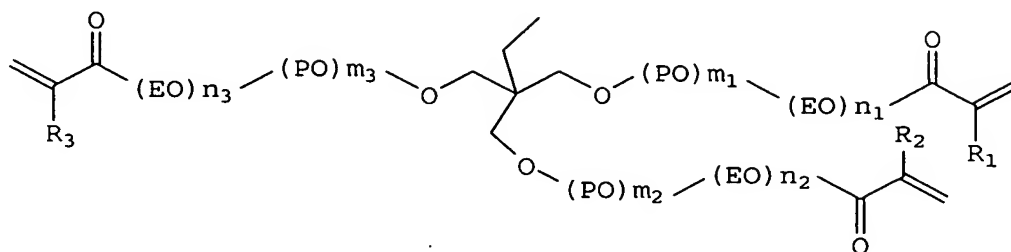


IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Previously presented) An ester F of formula I



I

wherein EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-,

PO is independently at each instance O-CH₂-CH(CH₃)- or O-CH(CH₃)-CH₂-,

n₁, n₂, and n₃ are independently 4, 5, or 6,

n₁ + n₂ + n₃ is 14, 15, or 16,

m₁, m₂, and m₃ are independently 1, 2, or 3,

m₁ + m₂ + m₃ is 4, 5, or 6, and

R₁, R₂, and R₃ are independently H or CH₃.

2. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein n₁ + n₂ + n₃ is 15.

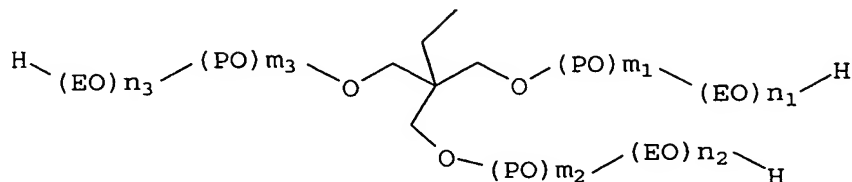
3. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein n₁ = n₂ = n₃ = 5.

4. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein m₁ + m₂ + m₃ is 5.

5. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein m₁ = m₂ = 2 and m₃ = 1.

6. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein R1, R2, and R3 are identical.

7. (Currently amended) A process for preparing an ester F of claim 1 from an alkoxyolated trimethylolpropane of formula II



II

wherein EO, PO, n1, n2, n3, m1, m2, and m3 are each as defined in claim 1,

and (meth)acrylic acid, comprising the steps of

a) reacting the alkoxyolated trimethylolpropane II with (meth)acrylic acid in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C, at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and optionally a water-azeotroping solvent E to form the ester F,

b) optionally removing from the reaction mixture some or all of the water formed in a), during and/or after a),

f) optionally neutralizing the reaction mixture,

h) when a solvent E is used, optionally removing the solvent E by distillation, and/or

i) stripping the reaction mixture with a gas which is inert under the reaction conditions,

wherein a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyolated trimethylolpropane in step (a) is at least 3.15:1.

8. (Currently amended) The process of claim 7 wherein

~~a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated trimethylolpropane is at least 3.15:1, and~~
the optionally neutralized (meth)acrylic acid present in the reaction mixture after the last process step substantially remains in the reaction mixture.

9. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the (meth)acrylic acid is not more than 75% by weight removed from the reaction mixture obtained after the last step, which reaction mixture contains the ester F.

10. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a DIN EN 3682 acid number of at least 25 mg of KOH/g.

11. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a (meth)acrylic acid content of at least 0.5% by weight.

12. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the molar ratio of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated trimethylolpropane in step a) is at least 15:1.

13. (Previously presented) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel comprising the steps of

k) polymerizing an ester F of claim 1 with (meth)acrylic acid, optionally with an additional monoethylenically unsaturated compound N, and optionally at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally at least one grafting base L,

l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

14. (Previously presented) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel comprising steps a) to i) of claim 7 and additionally

k) polymerizing the reaction mixture from one of steps a) to i) of claim 7, if performed, optionally with an additional monoethylenically unsaturated compound N and optionally at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally at least one grafting base L,

l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

15. (Previously presented) A polymer prepared according to the process of claim 13.

16. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel containing at least one hydrophilic monomer M in polymerized form crosslinked with an ester F of claim 1.

17. (Cancelled)

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Previously presented) A composition comprising
from 0.1% to 40% by weight of at least one ester F of claim 1,
0.5-99.9% by weight of at least one hydrophilic monomer M,
0-10% by weight of at least one esterification catalyst C,
0-5% by weight of at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and
0-10% by weight of a solvent E,
with the proviso that the sum total is always 100% by weight.

20. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 19 further comprising
a diluent G.

21. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel prepared from a composition of claim 19, and optionally postcrosslinked.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel having a saponification index of less than 10.

24. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel prepared according to claim 13 having a saponification index of less than 10.

25. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein R1, R2, and R3 are H.

26. (Previously presented) A polymer prepared according to the process of claim 14.

27. (Previously presented) An article comprising a polymer prepared according to the method of claim 13.

28. (Previously presented) The article of claim 27 selected from the group consisting of a hygiene article, a packaging material, and a nonwoven.

29. (Previously presented) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 23 having a saponification index of less than 8.

30. (Previously presented) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 24 having a saponification index of less than 9.